Urgent Need for Transit Facilities for North-East States Through Bangladesh, the Area Beinga Landlocked Region

SHRI KHAGEN DAS (Tripura) : Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I thank you for giving me an opportunity to raise the important issue of transit facilities to the land-locked North-East through Bangladesh for transportation of goods, materials and passengers.

It is well known that even after 52 years of Independence, the North-East remains vulnerably placed in terms of communication facilities. The entire North-East has to depend on just a small corridor through Assam which is called the Chicken's neck. The failure in developing appropriate transport and communication routes to the North-East is one of the most important reasons behind this region's under-development. Although the North-East region has a very large stock of oil and natural gas and other industrial raw materials, it has not been possible to utilise these natural resources for setting up of industries, due to the transportation problems - a halting hurdle for economic progress.

It may be mentioned that before the partition of India, trade, traffic movement and communication of most of the North-East were linked with the plain lands of British India, now in Bangladesh. Immediately after Independence and partition of the country the traditional communication link through Bangladesh got snapped.

I will specifically like to mention about the difficulties people have to face in my own State Tripura due to communication problems.

The distance between Agartala and Calcutta through Bangladesh is not more than 400 kms. through the surface route. The aerial distance between Agartala and Calcutta is 350 kms. Compared to this, the rail-cum-road distance from Agartala to Calcutta through Assam is 1,500 kms. The present rail-cum-road route passes through jungles, and many times, due to heavy rains, this route is blocked.

It is against this background that the North-Eastern States have been requesting the Government of India to take up this matter with the Government of Bangladesh so that transit facilities for Indian goods and passengers through Bangladesh could be available. The Chief Ministers of the North-Eastern States in a meeting at Guwahati last year also raised the demand. A large section of Bangladesh trade community and intellectuals

favour the extension of the transit facility and direct communication with the North-Eastern States. There were series of exchanges of visits of trade delegations and cultural teams from the North-Eastern States and Bangladesh during the last three years. Hence, there is the crying need of transit facility through Bangladesh for all the States in the North-Eastern region.

It may be mentioned that the Tripura Legislative Assembly has unanimously passed a Resolution in its last session, urging the Central Government to quicken the talks with Dhaka for a transit route through Bangladesh.

The direct bus service between Dhaka and Calcutta is a milestone in improving the bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh. The opening of the direct bus service between Calcutta and Dhaka raises a ray of hope for a similar facility in the minds of the people of the North-Eastern region, particularly Tripura. The people of Tripura and all other North-Eastern States expect and hope that the opening of the bus service, a transit route from Agartala to Calcutta *via* Bangladesh will soon materialise, with the initiative of the Government of India and co-operation of the Government of Bangladesh, in the interest of the economic development of the region as well as mutual benefit of the people of the subcontinent as a whole.

Thank you, Sir.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): Sir, with your permission, I want to say that I am in sympathy with this requirement and demand. As the hon. Member already knows, this Government has already acted in this regard. After all, the opening of the land route between Calcutta and Dhaka and the bus journey is the first step that was taken for opening up trade transit through Bangladesh. We are in negotiation with the Bangladesh Government in this regard.

The second aspect of the land route, as the hon. Member, no doubt, knows, is that we have already an agreement, in principle, on connecting Dhaka with Agartala, through a bypass. That has also been agreed to. It is only a small portion of the road track, the road near Akhaura that has fallen into disuse. We have very purposely tried to have that restored. We have also spoken to the Government of Bangladesh. It is not simply about the land route. The agreement in principle is for a multi-model transport arrangement. These are the steps in that direction. I can assure you that the Government is already acting in this regard.

SHRI KHAGEN DAS: Thank you, Sir.

Revival of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant

DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD (Andhra Pradesh): Sir, my Special Mention consists of two parts. The first part requests the Government to save the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, and the second part requests not to transfer the Steel Plant's lands to Gangavaram Port, Andhra Pradesh.

सर, पिछले तीन-चार सालों से दिल्ली में ही नहीं, पूरे भारत में प्रचार-प्रसार माध्यमों से यह कहा जा रहा है कि हम दिल्ली में सब कुछ कर रहे हैं । दिल्ली आकर राजाओं को और महारानियों को बना रहे हैं, किंग मेकर्स एंड क्वीन मेकर्स, लेकिन दुर्भाग्य की बात यह है कि ...(व्यवधान)...

SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY (Andhra Pradesh): How is it concerned with the Steel Plant? .... (Interruptions) ....

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): Let him make his submission. You are a veteran Member. Please don't be angry. *.....(Interruptions)*. ..

SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: What is he talking? How is the Steel Plant concerned with making kings and queens? Sir, how is Vishakha Steel Plant concerned with the points that he is making. *(Interruptions)* We want him to speak on Vishakha Steel Plant.. What is it that he is talking?

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI MD. SALIM): Kindly allow him to speak. You are a veteran Member. Don't get angry.

SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY: Sir, we want that he confines himself to the Special Mention on Visakhapatnam. *(Ingterruptions)* He started with Vishakha Steel Plant and then he is started... *(Interruptions)*

श्री रूमन्दला रामचन्द्रैया (आन्ध्र प्रदेश): महोदय व्यक्तिगत रूप से बात नहीं होनी चाहिए ...(व्यवधान)... जो विषय है, उस पर बात होनी चाहिए...(व्यवधान)...

उपसभाध्यक्ष (श्री मोहम्मद सलीम) : आप बैठिए ...(व्यवधान)...Please, take your seat. Allow him to speak. Ramchandraiah Ji.

श्री रूमन्दला रामचन्द्रैया : हम आपसे कहते हैं कि विशाखापट्टनम की बात करो...(व्यवधान)...